

Children character development

Volume 1

NEVER
GIVE
UP
ON
YOUR
DREAMS

L. BENSON

Never give up on your dreams

Losing his father was beyond Joseph's capability. Joseph lost interest in life. His attempt is resented by Bigboy and his associates, but he has Ross in his corner who motivates him. Will he abandon his dream of becoming a model and reject the rightful people God has placed on his path to achieve his dream? Will he allow the death of his father to destroy his plans? Does his low self-esteem stand between where he is and where God wants him to be?

Never give up on your dreams

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Volume 1**

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Contact address: L, Benson

P O Box M680

Kanye

Botswana

E-mail address: otengmontshiti@gmail.com

Contact number: (+267) 74 644 954

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Chapter 1

Everything that Joseph touched seem to attract failure. Everything he laid his eyes on seem to become dull. Every place he sat his feet seem to crumble. Indeed, he was a fool among fools, a loser among losers. Every step he took was to close the gap between where he was and where he longed to be. Every eye within the school premises was fixated upon him. The unbuttoned jacket of his suit danced behind as if it were celebrating his downfall. He squinted at the sun, cupped his eyes with his hand to guard against the bellowing wind, and dust snaking behind his heels. The boiling sun of Africa pierced through his black skin. He glanced up and saw white clouds hurrying across the sky- signifying spring and the first rains.

As Joseph aged 12, he stepped into the classroom, and a group of students chuckled, with some digging their elbows into each other's ribs. He registered embarrassment all over his face. Their class teacher, Ms Job, was not around. He had tried to report the abuse to her and told him to his face that Joseph must learn to confront them. Furthermore, she had told him that she wasn't in the teaching profession to babysit anybody, especially him. His class teacher even called him a "crying baby." Joseph was hopeless, especially when such words came from his teacher, who was supposed to protect, guide and encourage him where necessary. Her last words echoed in his mind, "I am not your mother" she shrieked.

Mr Kanye's Primary School contest was over, and he had failed. As he was walking along the aisle,

people's eyes were glued to him on his gray suit, red tie, and black shoes. Fear crippled his heart. He lost focus and trembled. He buried his hands in his pockets. After removing them, he fled from the room. Everybody's jaw dropped, and he went out and hid in the toilets. When the contest was over, he gathered enough courage to face people.

He strolled across the room dispirited with long strides. Joseph had a thin body and was tall with protruding teeth. He walked over to his desk, gathered his books, stuffed them into his bag, threw them over his shoulders and spun around, and walked towards the door. Then, he halted in his tracks when somebody called his name behind him.

"Hey, Joseph, what were you thinking? You can't win any contest. Do you ever look at yourself? Tall like giraffe," a short, muscular young boy named Bigboy mocked him while others giggled.

"From today onwards, you are called Joseph the giraffe," Mariam, a slim, tall, young girl, said as she threw a tuft of hair behind her head.

Another boy of medium height mocked Joseph's protruding teeth.

"In this world, winners and losers are born. You were born as a loser; you won't amount to anything in life," Bigboy continued as he cracked the atmosphere with laughter.

Joseph stood rooted to the spot, wishing that the ground could open and swallow him up alive. His face was in total embarrassment and, tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks like a flowing river.

"Be a man. A man should never cry. If you want to cry, take off your trousers and give them to one of the girls, loser," Bigboy laughed.

Joseph spun around, walked towards the door, and stepped out into the sunshine. He walked towards the water tap, offloaded his bag from his back, unzipped it, took out a cup, and filled it up with some water. Then he emptied its contents into his mouth and gulped. He glanced around the schoolyard. Students are busy playing various sports now. Some were playing football, others running, doing the high jump, and so on. He sauntered towards the wall of a classroom, holding his bag tightly in his right hand. He thrust it to the ground and leaned against the wall. Joseph recalled everything that had happened in his life. Bigboy had always told him he was a big loser and that he would amount to nothing. What if he and his group were correct? The thudding footsteps brought him to reality, and he looked toward the source of the sound.

A tall, handsome boy in white clothes approached, and his mouth curled into a smile. Joseph smiled back. He seemed to be a smart cookie, somebody whom he could have fun with, he said to himself. He stretched out his hand. Joseph hesitated, then found the courage to grab it and gave it a tight grip, and pain diffused through Joseph's body. However, the young boy concealed his painful facial expression.

"Hello, my name is Ross and who are you? He questioned Joseph, still holding hands.

Joseph responded by telling the boy his name.

"Buddy, I am glad to know you," Ross declared as they released each other's hands. They leaned against the wall side by side, looking at the activities going on around them.

"I am sorry about how other students are treating you," Ross continued, staring at the scenes before him.

"Don't worry, I know I am a loser as they have already said," he responded, rubbing his feet against one another.

"No, you aren't a loser. Everybody has something inside of them. Some people call it talent, and when you discover it, the sky is the limit," Ross assured Joseph and gave him a side glance with a smile on his face.

"The truth is bitter to swallow. It's high time I acknowledge I was born to die as a loser," Joseph said with reddish eyes which he rubbed with the back of his hand. Ross reached into his bag and gave Joseph a piece of toilet tissue to wipe the tears away.

"When I arrived at this school, they treated me in the same manner until I discovered what I excelled at," he lamented.

"What are you good at?" Joseph asked, showing interest in what he was saying. Ross glanced down at his garment. It was white and fastened with an orange belt. Joseph didn't understand.

"What are you wearing?" He asked as he softly touched them.

"This is Karate attire, " Ross explained.

"What are you training it for?" He asked.

"It is for self-defence,"

"That's the answer to my problems. I want to punch Bigboy and his associates in their faces!"

"That's not what Karate is for. It isn't for revenge, but self-discipline."

"What?" He gasped.

"You can join our club only if you want to develop discipline, not the other way around, and to respect other people, " Ross told him.

"It seems like a nice sport, I would like to join you tomorrow, "Joseph beamed.

" OK, only with positive motives, buddy, "he said, and Joseph nodded in agreement.

"I am staying at Kgwatlheng ward. What about you?" Joseph enquired as he straightened up.

"I am staying there too," they gathered their bags and started walking out of the school premises. The hot boiling sun of Africa stung their skins. They walked side by side for a while on the dusty road of Kanye. A place surrounded by hills and meandering rivers. Dust twisted behind their heels like slithering snakes.

Joseph was curious about the new sport. He threw questions at Ross, who answered him patiently. He asked him to show one or two techniques. Ross was hesitant, but he finally agreed. He asked him to throw

a punch at him, and like a flash of lightning, he blocked, leaving Joseph's jaw dropped.

"Wow, that's amazing. Are you saying that I will do stuff like that?" Joseph whispered and beamed.

"Yea, give me a hot clap," Joseph did as he was told, but Ross stepped aside, blocked it and a fist was shaking before his face. What amazed him was that he was swift like lightning.

"You don't need to be a karateka like me but discover that seed of greatness in your inside and be what God Almighty has created you to be," Ross said as they grabbed their bags and parted ways at the forked end of the road.

"I can't wait to join you tomorrow," said Joseph. His heart leapt with joy and excitement.

"Buddy, see you tomorrow then," Ross said as he waved at Joseph, who waved back.

Chapter 2

When Joseph reached home on the bank of the river that twisted along the village, his mother, Ms. Lorraine creaked the door open for him and gave him a huge bear hug. He buried his head in his mother's chest, and the warmth of motherly love diffused throughout his being. She brushed her hand over his head, pushed Jose away a little, and fixed her lovely eyes on his. Then her face cracked into a glowing smile, revealing her dimpled cheeks.

"How was your school today, my only son?" Mrs Lorraine Francis asked her son, holding him by the shoulders.

"Very well, you know I have found a new friend who stays a few blocks from here. A very interesting guy, full of wisdom, and tomorrow I am joining their karate club. Isn't that wonderful?" Joseph asked with a beaming face.

"Oh..., if that's what you want and are good at, you can join them, "she answered.

"Why is everybody around me doubting my potential? People like to say, "You must do what you are good at?" He asked with a gloomy face.

" Don't worry, my only son. As long as you are happy about it, I am fine. As a mother, I only want what is best for you,"

His face didn't change.

"When God created us before the foundation of the world, he deposited seeds of greatness inside all of us. You are his masterpiece, and your talent is unique. You must discover who you are and the unique talent you have. Nevertheless, I am very glad to see my son wearing a smile on his face. I love you, my only son," Ms Francis said as she leaned forward and kissed him on the forehead.

"Do you believe in me, Mum?" Joseph asked his mother as he scanned her face.

"Of course, I believe in you. I believe you are going to discover your talent, change the world and make it a better place, she encouraged him.

"Really?" his face glowed.

"Yes," his mother said as she spun around and disappeared into the kitchen.

Joseph plopped onto a tattered couch in the living room, grabbed the remote control, and switched on the television set. Then, he flipped through channels and stopped at the one he was looking for. He could hear the clattering of kitchen utensils in the background. The sweet aroma wafted from there and hit his nose.

On time, food was served; porridge, cabbage, and roasted meat. It was a delightful meal. Because that was what his mother could afford. She was selling vegetables and fruits in a basket in the streets of Kanye. They ate until they were satiated and flushed everything down with some water.

As dusk fell, they had their dinner and watched the late-night bulletin. They yawned, stretched their hands, dozed off, and finally retired to bed. They shared the same room. His mother slept on an old creaking bed, while Joseph slept on a thin mattress on the ground. He twisted like a worm every night because of sharp pain. His father passed away some years ago after a long illness. He worked in the gold mines of South Africa. He was the breadwinner. After his departure, they lived in deplorable conditions. Therefore, his mother had no option but to sell some vegetables in the streets of Kanye with a bowl on her head. Life was very tough. His father constructed the house, connected electricity, and water, and then went away to be with the Lord.

Meanwhile, Ross was complaining of a severe headache and a little fever and his mother, Mrs Rosemary, placed the back of her hand on his forehead and his temperature was very high.

She covered him with warm blankets and reached into her handbag for some Vitamin C pills, but all in vain. She was certain she had to take him to the clinic the following day.

There was a knock at the door. When she asked the person to identify himself, a familiar voice came from outside. It was his father's raspy voice. She walked towards the door, flinging it open, and he stepped inside. He was a tall, bulky man who was working at the local butchery as an assistant. She told him about their son's condition and went to his room to check on him. Ross was there curled into a ball, with reddish

eyes and a lamp glowing on the table in the corner of the room.

As the night wore out, the cockerels started shattering through the night, disturbing the sleeping village. His eyes closed, and he sunk into oblivion.

Chapter 3

The following day at school, when the bell for sports activities rocked the atmosphere around the school premises, students stormed out of their classrooms and flooded the playing grounds. Joseph was the last to step outside. He glanced around the school premises, but there was no sign of Ross. He strolled to his usual spot, leaned against the wall, and watched other children move around the school grounds. His mind was racing. He was wondering if his friend had played monkey tricks on him. Then, a young lady from his class passed by, and asked her where he was and told him that Ross wasn't feeling well.

Joseph decided that he would check up on him after school and the young lady continued with her journey towards the absolution blocks.

Joseph was all alone again because his genuine friend, who wanted to help him, was nowhere to be found or was sick. He leaned against the wall again, rubbing his feet against each other. What is next? Millions of thoughts raced across his mind. Then, voices grabbed his attention. They were coming from another room where karate training was being conducted.

Yes, Joseph, you can do it on your own, he said to himself as he gathered his bag, and walked across the schoolyard toward the source of the sound. As he was strolling like that towards the classroom written 'Karate Club' he heard footsteps behind him.

Joseph investigated the source of the sound. Something like a bulldozer pushed him to the ground, he lost his balance, crumbled into a heap on the ground and his bag flew over his head, and spilt the contents on the ground. When he glanced up, Bigboy was towering over him, wearing a demonic smile on his face and his friends chuckled in the background. Joseph scrambled to his feet, dusting the soil off his school uniform, boiling with anger.

"Loser, where are you going?" Bigboy asked, giggling as Joseph staggered towards books that were flipping in the wind, bent down, gathered his belongings, and stuffed them back into his bag. Then, he straightened up and walked toward the karate club with tears welling up in his eyes. Bigboy and his friends marched away laughing. Joseph wiped his tears with the back of his hands, sniffed, and rapped on the door. The noise on the inside drowned out his knocks. He turned the knob slowly, gave the door a push and stepped inside, and slowly shut it behind him.

They moved in a systematic pattern, throwing punches, blocking, and kicking. At the karate instructor's hand signal, they came to a dramatic halt with their hands on either side of their hips. He bowed down to them, spun around, and walked towards Ross.

"Hello, my name is instructor Mike. Do you want to join us?" He questioned him and Joseph nodded.

Joseph walked inside the storeroom and emerged after a few minutes wearing a black t-shirt and tracksuit.

Instructor Mike waved his hand, but Joseph remained rooted in his spot watching him blankly. Other students

dug into each other's ribs tenderly, throwing quick side glances, murmuring, and giggling.

The instructor rebuked them, and significant silence descended upon the room like the realm of the dead.

"Who are you?" Instructor Mike inquired.

"My name is-is Joseph," he stammered and the entire house roared with laughter.

"Don't worry, have you trained in karate before?" The instructor asked, looking at him with loving eyes after the laughter had died down and said no.

"Is it your first time?" He questioned him and Joseph answered in the affirmative.

" Job, take him aside and teach him the basics,"

Job nodded and stepped aside. Grabbed Joseph by his hand, and started teaching him the basics of karate: stance, punching and kicking.

As the session progressed and headed towards the end, instructor Mike called Joseph upfront while others sat down on the cold floor with folded feet. He asked him to show him what he had learned. He stood rooted to the spot, rubbing his feet against one another. Instructor Mike told him to calm down.

Joseph gathered enough courage and strength. He lifted his right foot. Then the other one slipped on the wet floor and crumbled into a heap with shame registered all over his face. Instructor Mike walked towards him, held him by the hand, and lifted him while the other students cracked their ribs with laughter. As

Mike loosened his grip, Joseph paced across the floor, gathered his bag, walked towards the door, swung it open, and slammed it shut behind him.

Chapter 4

From there, Joseph went to check up on his friend Ross. At the forked end of the road, he headed toward his house. He knocked on the door, flung it open, and the glowing face of his mother emerged. Then, he stepped inside, found his friend feeling better, and even sitting in the living room listening to music on the radio. They exchanged greetings and collapsed onto a couch beside him and thrust his bag on the floor, leaning against the side of the couch. And Ross' mother disappeared into the kitchen.

"Did you go to the Karate club on your own?" Ross asked with a smile on his face, and Joseph nodded.

"How was your first day there? Please, I want details, buddy." Ross said, sitting upright, grabbing the remote control, and switching off the radio.

"There is nothing to tell. I will never set foot there. I almost broke my skull on the floor," Joseph narrated the unfortunate incident in an angry voice.

"Don't worry," Ross assured him.

"Did you listen to what I have just said? No more karate training," Joseph said with a raised voice.

"Just relax. Maybe you need to be patient a bit, but if you don't want to continue, it's fine. You will in due course find what you are excellent at," Ross said, tapping his shoulder.

"Whatever. Can we change the topic, please? How are you feeling staying at home doing nothing?" Joseph threw a question at him. At that moment, Ross' mother emerged from the kitchen and offered him a can of soft drink. Joseph cracked it open and took a sip before placing it on the coffee table in front of him.

"Where were we? How do you feel about staying at home doing nothing?" Joseph repeated his question.

"I am absolutely fine and I am using this time to read books, and I will be at school tomorrow."

"I am glad you are fine. Looking forward to seeing you at school tomorrow. I am late. My mum is going to be mad at me," Joseph said, and he drained the soft drink into his mouth. Banged it on the table. Grabbed his bag, stood up, and dashed out of the house.

When Joseph arrived home, Ms Lorraine was doing some laundry in the backyard. Some clothes were in the water while others danced in the wind on the washing line. The sun was towering over the western horizon. He greeted his mother and halted in his tracks. Then, he glanced over his shoulders to listen to her who was calling after him.

"Can you go and buy me some sugar? Be quick," Ms Lorraine said. She straightened up and water dripped down her fingertips.

Within a couple of minutes, Joseph emerged from the door, Ms Lorraine slid her hands into the pocket of her African attire and produced a fifty-pula note. He took it, paced across the yard, and broke into a run.

Across the street, Bigboy and his associates were playing with a plastic ball on the dusty road. Bigboy lifted his eyes and identified Joseph while he was still at a distance. Then, he whispered something to his friends, who grabbed a rope and tied it across the road, burying it beneath the ground. Then they dashed behind clumps of trees and waited.

Joseph was running as fast as his legs could carry him. As he stepped over where the rope had been buried, the loose sand leapt into the air as it tightened and slid between his legs. Lost his balance, and crumbled into a heap on the ground. Fortunately, he supported himself with his hands and sustained minor bruises. Then, Bigboy and his associates leapt out behind the crumps of bushes and cracked demonic laughs. Joseph gathered himself up, crying and sobbing.

"I told you before that you are a loser," Bigboy said with laughter.

"Why do you hate me so much?" Joseph asked.

"Because you think you are smarter than all of us. In class, when the teacher asks questions, you always shoot your hands into the air. Not only that, you joined Mr Kanye Primary School contest; who do you think you are?" Bigboy said as he approached him threateningly. Then, Joseph spun around, broke into a run and they tailed him. He ran as fast as his little legs could carry him, heading towards the mall. When he glanced over his shoulders, they were behind his heels. As he approached a tarred road, a car came towards him at a tremendous speed. His heart and mind raced because if he stopped they were going to catch him. Joseph calculated its distance and lifted his feet. Then, Joseph zipped in front of it. It missed him

by an inch. The driver planted his brake pedal on the floor of the car and by the time it came to a halt he was far away. It had bought him time. The driver stopped his pursuers and asked them questions. Then, he mingled with the evening shoppers, bought some sugar, and used a different route when he returned home.

Meanwhile, as he ran like that, somebody living in a rented flat was looking at the magnificent Kanye village through the window when something grabbed his attention. He watched Bigboy and his associates pursuing Joseph and they disappeared in the distance and closed the curtains. He was a physical education teacher, Mr Moses.

Chapter 5

During lunch, Mr Moses called Joseph, Bigboy, and his associates into his office. They sat down on the chairs on the opposite side of his small office. Books on physical education were at the back. Golden trophies were on the table in the far right hand. He greeted them with a smile and asked them, drumming his fingers on the mahogany table.

"Yesterday I saw you chasing Joseph. I want to know what was going on. Bigboy, let's start with you."

"It- it was nothing, Sir," BigBoy mumbled.

"Joseph, what was going on? Tell me, is anybody abusing you?" he asked, keeping his eyes on him.

"We were?" Joseph held his tongue and shot quick side glances at the other students around the room. Fear struck him on the inside. To make matters worse, they gave him warning glances.

"Don't be intimidated, open up. I am here to help you in any way I can," teacher Moses assured him.

"We were playing together and when boredom sat in, we competed, that's all," Joseph said.

"Really,"

"Yes, it's the truth." They chorused.

" OK, you can go out now. Joseph, can I talk to you in private?" he asked, showing others the door with the

waving of his hand. Bigboy and the others walked out of the room, shooting glances over their shoulders with worried looks. If Joseph reveals the truth, they will be in deep trouble.

When they stepped outside, they sighed a mixture of fear, confusion, and relief. They were still not off the hook, especially when Joseph was alone with Mr Moses. However, they agreed they would ask him why he was asked to stay behind.

Meanwhile, in the physical education office, the teacher looked him in the eye, and his mouth curled into a smile.

"Joseph, you are talented. Yesterday, you shot like a rocket and I think you need somebody who can polish your talent and make it shine. You can be a star."

"Me! No, somebody once told me that losers are born and winners are born, too. I am in the category of losers."

"What? Who told you that rubbish? Oh yes, you can be whatever God has created you to be-you just need to discover what is inside of you," teacher Moses said, astonished.

"Really, but I have tried and failed before."

"You haven't failed. Sometimes you must try different things to discover what you are good at?"

"Really"

"Yes, you can be a star if you try harder. Today, you can join the high jump team. Are you OK with that?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir, " Joseph answered.

" OK, see you there. Welcome to your new home," the physical education teacher said as he stretched out his hand across the desk, grabbed Joseph's hand, and shook it gently. Then, Joseph scrambled to his feet, walked towards the door, swung it open, and slammed it shut behind him.

Gong! The school bell shattered the stillness of the afternoon. Then, feet shuffled, books slammed shut and tossed into the bags. Students shot to their feet and stormed out of the classroom. Joseph was the last person to come out as usual. His heart leapt with excitement when he found Ross waiting for him in the corridor. They exchanged greetings

"Are you joining us today?" Ross asked.

"No, I have an appointment with the physical education teacher for...." Joseph was cut short when teacher Moses called him in the middle of the schoolyard.

" Joseph, let's go," he screamed with his hands behind his back.

They agreed they would meet later. He grabbed his bag, hurried towards teacher Moses, and caught up with him. They paced across the schoolyard in silence, with the boiling sun of Africa warming their black skin like somebody running a warm bath. When they

emerged around the corner of a block of standard 7 classrooms, a group of students doing long and high jumps came into view. When they reached them, they stopped whatever they were doing and gave teacher Moses maximum attention. He greeted them and returned the favour. Then, he introduced Joseph to them.

"Today, we have a new member, and his name is Joseph. Please, let's welcome him," the roar of clapping of hands erupted.

"You can continue with whatever you were doing while I teach Joseph the basics of the long and high jump. He has all the qualities- look at his physique, it is amazing, isn't it?" He said while other students nodded and dispersed around the playground. The activities went well. Toward the end, the teacher asked Joseph to show what he had been taught. However, he remained rooted on the spot and rubbed his feet with one another. The teacher tapped him on the shoulder to assure him.

"Take it easy, we are all learning here," he said as he spun around, glancing at each student, who nodded. Then confidence sat in, and he started with a long jump. He raced between the white lines on the ground, leapt, and landed with his feet on the sandy soil.

The physical education teacher nicely advised him accordingly and started the entire process again. However, he almost twisted his fingers as he landed once more. He groaned in pain, and refused to do it over again. Physical Education Teacher told him he could try the high jump if he felt uncomfortable with it. The bar was set lower, uplifted, and he somersaulted over it. He came racing again; the bar was at his waist

level and he thrust himself up. The bar tangled between his legs and crumbled into a heap on the mattress. He shot to his feet, angry, dashed out, and disappeared behind a block of the classroom.

Chapter 6

When sports activities were over, teacher Moses strolled across the schoolyard with his hands behind his back. He spotted Joseph leaning against the wall with his head buried between his thighs, and Ross staring down at him. He walked over to them and tapped Joseph on the shoulder and he glanced up with streams of tears rolling down his face.

"Don't worry, you can do it, it is well," teacher Moses comforted him.

"Nothing is well with me. I am a loser, period," Joseph said with mumbling and quivering lips.

"Who told you that?" The teacher asked him.

"Everybody says that I am a loser and I won't amount to anything in life,"

"It is a lie," You are a brilliant boy and full of potential," Teacher Moses said.

"I have been telling him the same thing," Ross said with a concerned face.

"Thank you for supporting him. You are indeed a genuine friend," Teacher Moses said, looking into Ross' eyes.

"You don't understand. I have tried everything in school, but I have failed," Joseph sobbed.

"No, I am done with trying and receiving mockery and shame," Joseph reasoned with them.

"Trying new things will help you discover your true potential," the teacher answered.

"Really?" Joseph said with a light of hope flashing on his face.

"Yes," he said as he stretched out his hand.

"I agree with teacher Moses. Joseph, you have great potential," Ross said.

Then, Joseph grabbed teacher Moses' hand and yanked him to his feet. They gathered their bags and walked side by side, heading home.

The following day, at school, the playing ground swelled with people. They were running, jogging, and doing some workouts. Joseph was among them. They were sweating profusely. Clouds trotted across the sky and threw darts of shadows here and there on the ground as the sun buried its head and emerged behind them. Gradually blanketing the African sky.

A team of four hundred meters relay team was selected and Joseph was going to finish the race. Athletes stood straight at the starting point.

"On your marks!" they stoop down.

"Get ready, set!" and the gun barked, shattering the stillness of the afternoon.

Joseph's team was in the lead, and eventually, it was his turn. He grabbed the baton, held his chest up, tore through the wind, and turned around the last hundred meters. People yelled, clapping, and Joseph ran as fast as his long thin legs could carry him. Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain in his thighs, his legs tightened, and crumbled to a heap on the ground. The clapping of hands ceased, and murmuring erupted. Teacher Moses raced across the playing grounds, grabbed his legs, and massaged them. Then Joseph scrambled to his feet and limped across the ground. They had lost.

His team was devastated. When the time was over, Joseph walked across the school premises and teacher Moses stopped him in his tracks.

"Well done, remember never give up. You can do it," he said. Joseph nodded and continued to walk towards the blocks of classrooms.

Clouds overhead had covered the earth with shadows. Then he glanced up and realized that the rain clouds had gathered.

"Where is Ross?" Joseph asked himself.

Joseph spun around when he heard some footsteps approaching him from behind. What he saw made his heart skip a bit and fear swirled in his heart. Bigboy and associates were approaching him and encircling him. They looked at him from head to toe with twisted faces.

"Who do you think you are? You have just made my friend's team fail. I have told you again and again that you are a loser and you won't amount to anything in life. So stop moving from one sports activity to another. Next time, if you take part in any sports activity, I am

going to punch you in the face," Bigboy said, shaking a fist before his eyes.

"Yes...Yes." Joseph mumbled. His face flushed with fear.

"Good boy," Bigboy cracked a wicked smile and others giggled in the background.

"Loser," they chorused.

The rain blinded the earth with tiny droplets, a cool breeze hit their noses and they parted ways. Joseph hurried home. His mother wasn't home. The rain poured down in buckets, and he collapsed onto a couch and listened to the hissing rain on the rooftop. He was dispirited and heartbroken, and with no spark of hope.

"What if Bigboy and his friends are correct about me, when they say I am a loser and winners are born," His thoughts were disrupted by footsteps outside and a knock at the door that followed.

Chapter 7

Joseph yanked to his feet, walked towards the door, and creaked it open. An old woman with a wrinkled face, water dripping down from her tattered clothes, and quivering, stood in the doorway. He pitied her and ushered her inside, supporting her fragile body, and sat down on the wooden chair. He rushed into the kitchen, boiled some water, poured it into a bowl for her to bathe in the bedroom, and gave her some of his mother's clothes to put on. Joseph wrapped her in a blanket. In no time, she was sipping a steaming cup of tea, holding it with her shaky hands.

She looked at Joseph and her mouth curled into a weak but heart-warming smile.

"You are a kind boy. I don't know how I can thank you."

"It's fine, grandmother, as long as you are under a roof and enjoying the warmth."

"That's sweet of you. Who are you?" she asked, clearing her throat.

"My name is Joseph."

"It's a nice name. Do you know Joseph in the Bible, who went through a lot in life before becoming the prime minister of Egypt?" she asked him in a trembling voice.

"Yes, grandmother."

"Do you know that behind every name there is a character?" She asked as she sipped some tea.

"I didn't know that. Maybe that's why everything I lay my hands on scatters and everybody calls me a loser." Joseph said in amazement.

"They don't know what they are talking about. Everybody is great, including you. You are a brilliant boy. The problem with you is that you aren't real."

"What do you mean?"

"In life, if you want to be what God almighty has created you to be, you must be real to yourself. That's to say, don't allow people to discourage you," she said as she lifted the cup to her mouth and emptied its contents into her mouth.

"I think I understand what you are talking about."

"What are you doing right now?"

"I am a schoolboy."

"Doing what apart from reading books and writing notes?"

"Nothing"

"Why?"

"Because I have tried everything and failed."

"Did you complete what you started?"

"No, people always mock me when I fail. I have given up on my dreams"

"That's where you are wrong. In life, don't listen to the voices of discouragement, focus on your potential and develop it, and above all, be patient!"

"I don't understand. I am..."

"Listen, young man, you just need the right people to help you discover the treasure inside of you."

"Who? My Physical Education teacher has failed to help me."

"No, did you listen to him? In life, if you want to achieve your dreams, you must listen to other people who have your best interest at heart and be focused."

"What can I do? I need your help because you are loaded with wisdom?"

"I can help you." Joseph kept quiet.

"Do you want my help or not?"

"OK, where do you stay?" Joseph asked.

"Deep down in the Savanna Jungle"

"What?"

"Yes, if you want my help, I will meet you tomorrow in the forest at the edge of the village. Thank you once again for your kindness. Our meeting must remain secret. Don't tell anybody, including your mother."

"Why?"

"Don't worry, you will know at the right time. Remember, life is a mystery."

" My mouth is sealed," Joseph said and moved his fingers along his lips.

"Tomorrow, we are starting a 7-day mystery program of success," she paused and listened. The rain had diminished, and she scrambled to her feet and staggered towards the door and opened it, and halted in the doorway.

"Be on time," she said and banged the door behind her.

Roofing sheets rattled. A few minutes passed, and the door was opened. His mother came from the market with a bucket full of vegetables and fruits well balanced on her head and wearing African attire. She took it off her head and put it on the floor and sat beside her son. After exchanging pleasantries, she asked him.

"Who was that old woman who had just left the house?"

"It was just an old woman with no name."

"No name, you must be out of your mind. Everybody has a name."

"I forgot to ask her."

"Why was she wearing my clothes?"

"Mom, she has drenched in the rain and I gave her one of your clothes to put on. To make matters worse, she is a fragile old woman."

"My only son, please next time don't give people my things without my permission, OK?"

"Yes, mom."

"What was she looking for?"

"Nothing."

"Where does she stay?"

"I don't know."

" OK, enough of the old woman. What do we eat for dinner?"

Then, she shot to her feet and boiled some water in a kettle, and made some tea.

"So, how was your training today?"

" What training?"

"At school."

"It was fine, and thank you for asking."

As the night wore out, they crawled under their blankets and sunk into oblivion.

Chapter 8

"Hey, Joseph, how are you?" Teacher Moses asked with his hands on his back when he approached Joseph's usual spot.

"I am fine, Sir," Joseph replied.

"If you need anything or help, just come to my office and I am ready to help you."

"Yes, sir."

"From today, I am going to give you a personal space or time to think or review your life. When you are ready for my help, come to my office. You have great potential."

"But look at me, a poor young boy who is a laughingstock of the world and called a loser."

"Take it easy, my boy. Everything starts small in life, but when you allow the right people to help you discover who you are, you are elevated into stardom. Please, don't push away people who want to help you, some..." teacher Moses paused, and spun around to identify the source of the sound. It was Ross, and they exchanged greetings.

"Ross, I am proud of you for taking good care of your friend. That's what friends are for. They are there to support each other not only in words, but they place resources at each other's disposal to achieve their dreams."

"Thank you Sir for your kind words."

"No, thank you, continue supporting him by all means possible."

"Yes, sir."

Then, teacher Moses said goodbye, turned around and walked across the school premises, and disappeared around the corner of the classrooms.

"Hey, it is the weekend. What are your plans?"

"Throughout the weekend, I will be with my mother at the market selling her stuff and helping with other house chores."

" OK, I thought maybe we could meet you now, play together and build mud castles on the bank of the river."

"That's a pleasant idea, but as I have told you, I will not be available."

"Ok, let's go home."

They walked down the dusty streets, glancing around the magnificent hills surrounding the village. The colourful carpet of flowers stretched around them. They had been revived by rain that fell the previous day. When they reached the forked end of the road, they parted ways. Joseph walked towards his house, glanced over his shoulders, and realized that Ross had already disappeared around the corner and he changed his direction. He paced towards the forest and the sun was hovering in the western sky.

Joseph weaved through the thick forest and ultimately stopped, sat down on a rock and waited. He rubbed his feet against each other listening to many noises. Birds whispering, wind hissing through the trees, and tall blades of grass dancing in the wind. However, there was no sign of the old woman. Was she a ghost or what? The mystery behind her became difficult to crack open.

The nearby trees threw shadows at his feet and became larger and larger on the ground-signaling that the sun was ending its journey across the African sky. Joseph grabbed his bag, sucked his teeth, spun around, and walked away. As he emerged from the forest he heard whistles coming from either side of the road and Bigboy and his friends encircled him. His face flushed with fear and panic sat in. He glanced around, planning to break into a run. Unfortunately, they had already read his mind.

"Don't try to escape. I know what you are thinking," Bigboy said, approaching him with a menacing face.

"I am not... not," Joseph stammered.

"You have some explaining to do. What were you talking about with teacher Moses?"

"Nothing"

"Don't lie to us. Otherwise, you are going to face the consequences of your actions," one of his associates said and twisted his ear and Joseph groaned.

" OK, he asked me if I was interested in joining any sport and I told him I was not," Joseph said with his eyes welling up with tears.

"Good boy, from today I don't want to see you playing anything at school. You are a loser," Bigboy warned him, and Joseph nodded.

"Can I ask you something?" Joseph asked.

"Yes, and do it fast," Bigboy said with a tone of impatience clear in his voice.

"Why do you hate me so much? I have done nothing wrong."

"We don't hate you. We hate what you are doing. You are everywhere in school. One day you will take part in the Mr Kanye contest, the next karate, and so on. You think you are smarter than us, but you are a loser. Do you hear me? Giraffe," Mariam intercepted and threw a bunch of hair behind her head.

"Look at him, you look like a vampire," Bigboy ridiculed him and cracked a demonic smile across his face, and others chuckled in the background.

"What were you doing in the forest by yourself?" Bigboy asked him with a stern face.

"Maybe he went there to answer the call of nature. Who knows? Losers usually do strange things," another one shouted.

"I was doing nothing."

"I am counting to three and you must run as fast as your long legs can carry you. One, two..." Before Bigboy could finish counting, Joseph shot like a bullet. They hit their feet on the ground, clapping hands and giggling at the same time.

Chapter 9

Joseph ran as fast as his legs could carry him, glancing over his shoulders. However, nobody was breathing on his neck. He thrust the door open, startling his mother, who was drinking some tea. She banged the cup on the coffee table. She gave her son a quizzical look. He was panting, beads of sweat glittering on his forehead.

"My son, what is going on? You have never entered the house without knocking. Is something wrong?" She asked.

"No, mother, I was running around the village exercising. You know, exercising keeps our body and mind healthy. That's what I was taught at school during my science lessons. Mother, I put what I have learned into practice," Joseph came up with fabricated stories.

"I am thrilled for you. Finally, my only son has found something useful to do. Thank God. When your father passed away, you were badly wounded on the inside, dispirited and discouraged. I am more than happy when I see you gathering your confidence," Ms Loraine said, and a tear of joy rolled down her face.

"Don't cry Mum, everything is fine," Joseph said, and he grabbed some tissue, handed it to her, and dabbed her face.

"Thank you so much. I am very proud of you"

"It's OK Mum"

Joseph walked to their tiny bedroom and lay on her back, staring at the twisting and creaking roofing sheets. He was disturbed because what he had said was a blue lie. The image of Bigboy and his friends raced across his mind, sending an electric wave down his spine. He wanted revenge. The knocking at the door brought him to reality.

A familiar voice reached his ears. What's teacher Moses doing here?" His mind raced and evaluated every bit of his life at school. What if he tells his mother that he isn't cooperating with teachers or not taking part in sports activities? Anxiety sat in and the only way to fill out was to walk into the living room and join them. He scrambled to his feet and walked into the living room. He greeted them and sat down. He smiled at him.

"Sir, can I get you some tea or coffee?" Joseph asked.

"No, thank you."

"Welcome to my humble home. I am happy to meet you. Thank you, sir, for taking good care of my son." Ms Lorraine said, smiling.

"Mum, teacher Moses always motivates me"

"Thank you, Sir, for taking good care of my only son."

"You are welcome. Ross told me that Joseph lost his father some years ago, and I also lost my father at a tender age. I know how difficult it is to sail through that chapter. It is a painful and confusing experience. However, the moment I heard about it I wanted to help

in any way possible. To discover who he is, his talent, and reach his full potential," Then, his hands slid into his brown jacket's pocket, retrieved a piece of paper, and unfolded it.

"Next week, there is going to be a Mr Southern District contest and the winner will walk away with 50.000 pula (Botswana currency). I thought you might be interested."

"No, sir, I have tried in the local contest. How can I survive in a bigger one? You know, the humiliation and shame I am going to face, Sir, with respect I am not in."

"My boy, you should never give up on your dreams. Let me tell you a story about me. When I finished my matric- I failed twice. I wanted to be a teacher. My family was very poor, but I didn't focus on my background. I found a job as a truck assistant, loading and offloading building materials. My mind told me to give up, but my spirit told me to keep pressing on. I raised enough money, retook my examinations, and passed with flying colours. Today, I am living my dream. I am a teacher creating a generation of problem solvers"

"Sir, my son is blessed to have you in his life."

"People laugh at me because I have failed frequently and I feel degraded."

"They don't know what they are talking about. In life, no matter what you do, there will always be people who attack you but focus on the dream or vision ahead of you," teacher Moses motivated him.

"It's true. When his father passed away, who was the breadwinner, I realized that if I focused on what people said, we were going to die of hunger and starvation. I started selling vegetables and fruits at the market to put some food on the table. And to give my only son the best education," Joseph's mother said, holding back tears in her eyes.

"Greatness is on the inside and it is revealed when you become real to yourself," Teacher Moses said as he pushed the paper across the table, leapt to his feet, and said goodbye. When he reached the doorway, he halted, spun around, and said,

"If you are interested in the contest please, let me know so that I can help you in any way possible. Remember, never give up your dreams in life." Then, he opened and slammed the door behind him. His car sputtered and roared to life and drove off. Its sound diminished in the distance.

"My only son, God has prepared great blessings on our paths, but if you don't grab opportunities, you won't reach your destiny."

Joseph leapt to his feet and disappeared into the bedroom, their words ringing bells in his head. He heard his mother saunter inside and climb onto her creaking bed. His mind kept on twisting and turning and, eventually, he fell asleep.

Chapter 10

"Joseph, wake up, breakfast is ready," The voice of his mother jerked him awake and the delicious smell of food hit his nose. He opened his eyes and glanced around, and the golden rays of the sunlight flittered through the cracks in the curtains, which continued to dance rhythmically as the howling wind outside filtered through thin lines around the windowpanes.

"I am coming, Mum," Joseph answered, lying on his back and looking at the galvanized roofing sheets and rafters. The conversation from the previous day flooded his mind. He imagined people cracking their ribs with laughter because of his physical appearance. He crawled out of his blankets and licked his teeth. Then he brushed his teeth. After that, he joined his mother in their tiny living room and had a breakfast of bread, fried eggs, and some tea. His mother looked him in the eyes.

"Son, I want you to know that you are the best at whatever you do. Never allow anybody to discourage you. You are God's greatest creation and he has deposited seeds of greatness inside of you." Joseph nodded and he threw the last crumb of bread into his mouth.

"You are free to join me today at the market"

"Yes, mother, but I have some homework to do," Joseph lied.

After breakfast, his mother fixed herself to go to the market. She carried a bucket of vegetables and fruits

well balanced on her head and wore a long black skirt and a white shirt with black sneakers.

Joseph waited for a few minutes to make sure she was gone. Then, he went into the kitchen, washed the dishes, cleaned the house, and made his bed. As the morning sun rose, he went into the forest again. This time around he had thrown a few slices of bread in his rack-sack and exited the house. He waited at the exact spot he was in the previous day. Joseph glanced around, but nobody was around. The only thing that disturbed the peace of the forest was the hissing wind through the trees and the smell of nature. Joseph felt at peace with the world, away from his abusers.

Joseph sat on a stone and waited. But there was no sign of the old woman at all. What if she is a scam? He thought. Impatience sat in and the sun was overheard. Every little sound attracted his attention. He kept on watching the surrounding countryside. He saw a small, unusual tree that wasn't found in Kanye's environment. It's found mostly in the Kalahari Desert. He was astonished.

He saw a funny scene-it looked like the area had burned and a certain tree had grown again. Then, he realized that the sun was descending. But, there was no sign of the old woman. He gathered his stuff and went home again. He was furious and dispirited.

The following day after school, he went home with his friend Ross and separated. They headed towards their respective homes. He was sick and tired of being made a fool and the mysterious old woman had hopped onto the wagon of mockery. When he reached home, he

threw the bag on the floor, slopped on a couch, shut his eyes, and took a quick snap. He saw himself racing toward a huge stadium and the doors were closed before he could enter.

To make matters worse, people were mocking him because he was barefooted. He became angry and engaged in a spirit of prayer. He prayed with all his heart, tears rolling down his face and sweating profusely. Then, the door was miraculously flung open, and he entered. People around the stadium, which was filled to the bream, clapped hands for him.

He jerked to life and shot to his feet. The first word that rang in his mind was "remember patience pays. Never give up on your dreams."

Chapter 11

Joseph shot to his feet, dashed to the door, and raced across the village at tremendous speed. The afternoon sun was shining in the cloudless sky of Africa. When he got to his usual spot, there was nobody or a sign of the old woman. He glanced around and said in his mind,

"Maybe I should just give up," he turned and walked away with a heavy heart. The footsteps and creaking of leaves grabbed his attention.

"Bigboy, not you again," Joseph said as he spun around and released a sigh of relief at what he saw. Two young boys were approaching him. They told him the old woman had sent them to come and collect him.

"Where? Because this is a thick forest," Joseph asked, pointing around with his fingers.

"Don't worry," they chorused. Joseph glanced at their garments. They were spotlessly clean and white. One boy had wrapped another one around his arm. They were handsome-looking boys, humble and loving.

"This is for you," he handed him the garment.

"For me, what for?" Joseph asked with a quizzical face.

"Just put it on," they urged him.

Joseph grabbed it and wrapped it around his body. Suddenly, the atmosphere changed. It's like he was in a dream. He was mounted in the sky of Africa. After

some time, a beautiful castle emerged in the distance. The streak of smoke was turning and twisting on the horizon. As they came closer, he realized it was surrounded by colourful roses, springs of water were everywhere, the wonderful breeze whipped their faces, and the sweet aroma hit their noses and landed with a soft thud on the ground.

"Wow, this is beautiful. Who owns this place?" Joseph asked with excitement registered on his face.

"The old woman."

"Really?"

"Yes."

They walked across the green grass, children were playing in their jumping castles while others were sweeping the yard.

As they approached the buildings, the doorman opened the door for them. They stepped inside. The old woman was in a spacious living room with everything you could dream of. That's to say, television sets, radio, and so on. Joseph greeted her, and she staggered to her feet and gave him a bear hug after switching off the television.

"Welcome to my humble home," she said with a fragile and trembling body. Her smile ignited every spark of hope inside of him.

"Thank you, grandmother," he answered.

"You were angry when I didn't show up as I promised you?" The old woman asked, and Joseph nodded.

"How did you know?"

"I know because somebody has been watching you all the time," she said, pointing at a dove as it flew across the room and landed on her shoulder.

"That's not possible."

"It's because, in the spirit realm, things talk. Dove says hello to Joseph."

"Hello, Joseph," Dove replied, and it shocked him to the core.

" You have passed your two-day lessons."

"What? That's ridiculous!"

"You have learned a lot. In life, you must never give up on whatever you want to achieve. In this world, patience pays. One principle of success is that opportunities come and those who grab them prevail in life. I know you have been invited to enter a contest and you must grab it. However, a few things need to be corrected in your life and your next lesson starts tomorrow."

In no time, one of the young boys came into the room with a bowl full of water and washed their hands. Another one full of fruit was passed around and everybody grabbed something to munch on. After that, Joseph was taken to where he was before in the forest. The two boys accompanied him. They told him he could keep the garment as he would need it from time to time and told him to keep it away from people. They parted ways.

After school, Joseph went to the forest, opened his bag, and retrieved his white garment and in no time, he was at the castle. The old woman welcomed him and gave him an assignment. She asked him to chop some firewood, wash dishes, clean the house, cook some food, and as he was chopping wood like that, one boy came along and made fun of him.

"Hey, what are you doing? That's not the right way to handle an axe. You look funny," he threw degrading words at him, but Joseph kept working.

After chopping some firewood, Joseph took the dishes from the kitchen and cleaned them on a long table under the Morula tree. He was humming a sweet song when his happiness was disrupted. The same boy who tried to provoke him when he was chopping some wood came and threw some sand on the dishes. He was crossed and went to the house and reported the incident to the old woman.

"Son, I don't care what is going on outside. What I want is spotlessly clean dishes," she said as she collapsed on a couch with a cup of a steaming cup of tea dancing in her hands.

Joseph dashed outside the house, searched around for the boy who had soiled his dishes and grabbed him by the collar. He dragged him to the table and told him in an authoritative voice to wash them. The young boy cleaned them with fear registered all over his face. As Joseph spun around to do another task, he saw the old woman in the doorway with a smile curled across her wriggled face. She spun around and staggered inside the house.

A bowl of fruit was introduced in their midst, and everybody grabbed a fruit. The old woman started speaking with her usual golden voice.

"Joseph, you have passed today's test, "she giggled.

"I don't understand."

"I was watching you confronting the other boy. I was impressed. Son, sometimes in life we must confront our fears or challenges to emerge victorious." The lesson was over and Joseph was told to report the next day.

Chapter 12

The following day at school, Joseph waited for his friend at his usual spot. As he was waiting like that, a bunch of his abusers marched across the schoolyard toward him and giggled. His heart leapt to his throat. They stood in front of him, and Bigboy started the conversation.

"You are a good loser. You are obeying my commands to the letter," Bigboy said with a smile on his face.

"Yes, he is an obedient boy. I am proud of you, Joseph," Mariam murmured, and the rest of the group giggled. Joseph's face was flushed with fear and the little voice whispered on the inside,

"Remember, sometimes we must confront our fears to emerge victorious." Then, boldness melted fear away in his heart.

"Shut up! From today, if you don't change your attitude towards me, I am going to report you to the school authorities or I will find a way of dealing with you and it might not be a pleasant one," they leapt away shocked to the core. The murmuring and giggling stopped. They were facing a different version of Joseph.

"Hey, you are a loser," Bigboy said.

"What have you just called me?" Joseph asked, approaching them menacingly, and they moved away from his presence, one after the other. When he gathered his composure, he saw Ross watching him with utter amazement and walked towards him.

"That's amazing, boldness and bravery in its purest form," Ross said, curling his arms around him and giving him a bear hug.

"What for?"

"You just scared the hell out of those boys," Ross answered.

"It's nothing. Somebody once told me that sometimes you have to confront your fears to emerge victorious," Joseph said with a smile as he gathered his bag and they walked out of the school premises.

When he arrived at the castle, Joseph was asked to do the same tasks he had been doing the previous day. He was bored. However, Joseph went out and did exactly what he was told and completed it. He was exhausted, and he collapsed on a bench, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. The old woman came along and sat beside him.

"You are doing fine, son."

"I have learned nothing today because I was doing the same thing as yesterday."

"Please, I don't want to do the same thing repeatedly."

"You don't understand, repeating something leads to perfection. You are busy strolling down the road of perfection. And in life, we learn from our mistakes, and forgiveness is the master key to the life of prosperity, peace, and harmony."

"I have got so much to learn," Joseph was amazed.

"Boys gather around," and the whole yard trembled as children raced across it and sat around her. She asked the boy who harassed Joseph the previous day to stand up.

"You owe Joseph an apology."

"I'm sorry, Joseph, for what I did to you yesterday," he asked and bowed his head.

"I am not God, I don't forgive people," Joseph said.

"That's where you are wrong, Joseph. You must learn to forgive and forget. If you carry bitterness and anger around, you won't amount to anything," the old explained.

"I ..."

"Don't interrupt me, OK," Then a young boy with a bowl full of an array of fruits came, passed it around and everybody grabbed one for him or herself.

"Lack of forgiveness has made the entire world blind. Creativity, prosperity, and joy have ceased because of a lack of forgiveness. Please, accept his apology and tell me how you feel afterwards." She continued.

"Apology accepted, "Joseph obeyed the old woman.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"I feel relieved on the inside. I feel like somebody has removed a bag of cement from my shoulder," Joseph said, beaming.

"That's the power of forgiveness, and your life will never be the same. Do you know why a bowl full of fruit is passed around every day, son?" she asked him.

"No, Mam."

"It's a lesson too. In life, you must learn to share whatever you have with others. At school, if you are gifted in a certain subject, don't be selfish. You must look around you for somebody who is struggling and help him or her. Life becomes more interesting when your brother or sister's problem becomes your concern. Because when we join hands together and challenge each other's weaknesses, difficult situations become lighter."

"What about...?"

"That's enough for today. Tomorrow we are continuing with our character development programs," she said as she staggered to her feet and disappeared into the castle. The class was dismissed, and Joseph wrapped his white garment around his body. In no time, he landed in the forest and headed home.

Chapter 13

"Knock, knock anybody in?" Joseph knocked on the door of teacher Moses' office after school.

"Come in," Teacher Moses answered on the inside.

Joseph slid the door open and slammed it behind him. Teacher Moses lifted his eyes from the newspaper he was reading and his mouth curled into a smile. He offered him a chair to sit on. Then, Joseph told him he was interested in joining Mr Southern District's contest.

"Why have you changed your mind? You seem to have changed, son. What is behind that?" He answered with a quizzical look as he slammed the newspaper shut on the table.

"Because somebody has told me that sometimes in life I shouldn't give up on my dreams to emerge victorious, and if I don't confront my fears, I will never become what God has created me to be," Joseph answered with a smile.

"Wow, that's wonderful. I am learning a lot from you. Who has been teaching such stuff?" He asked, leaning towards him over the mahogany table.

"It's... never mind," Joseph said, waving his hand.

"Whoever is teaching you, he or she is teaching wisdom right from the throne of God. Anyway, when do you want to start your preparation?" He asked, changing the subject.

"I am still doing some stuff and within a couple of days, it will be over. I will make myself available," Joseph responded and stood up.

"Please, Joseph, I am awesomely proud of you. You will tell me when you are ready," Joseph smiled, spun around, paced across the floor, flung the door open, and banged it behind him. Teacher Moses spent a few minutes on what Joseph had just said,

"This boy is going to be a star. Wisdom and knowledge are found in him. The moment I saw him, I knew a raw diamond was dormant in his heart. Thank God, that diamond is being revealed," teacher Mosses nodded, grabbed his newspaper, flipped through the pages, stopped at the page he wanted, and read it again. A knock at the door startled him.

As the door slid open, a tall, gracious teacher, Ms Moz strolled into the room, wearing a red blouse, a black skirt revealing her well-fleshed figure, hips swaying as her stilettos tip-tapped on the concrete floor, and her long oiled hair dancing on her back. She was a guidance and counselling teacher. Teacher Moses closed the newspaper and banged it on the table. And his face cracked into a smile and she smiled back, revealing her dimpled cheeks and long clean teeth.

She pushed the chair away, sat down on the opposite side of the table, and exchanged pleasantries. They discussed issues about the school, students' behaviour, current affairs, and so on. Then, Teacher Moses brought the issue to the table that was in his heart.

"Do you know Joseph, who is doing standard six?" He asked.

"Yes, the thin, tall boy with protruding teeth."

"Exactly, that boy needs some help, but it isn't my area of expertise. Could you please absorb him in one of your classes? He needs lots of guidance and counselling."

"Why?"

"Because there is something that has been troubling him and he was here a few minutes ago. He is opening up and I think soon I will take him to your class." He furthermore told her that he had tried to report his behaviour to his class teacher who seemed not interested in his welfare. What surprised him the most was when she told him that Joseph would end up in prison. That's his destiny. Therefore, she didn't have time for people who were not ready to change. The guidance and counselling teacher told him that she couldn't understand why she said words like that, especially to a young child like Joseph.

She assured him that she was readily available to help the boy and walked out of the room, and the sound of her footsteps diminished in the distance after slamming the door behind her.

Meanwhile, Joseph and Ross walked along the dusty street of Kanye heading home. The sun of Africa was cracking its skin with heat and the wind rattled through the trees. They strolled in silence for a while, and Ross started a conversation.

"Joseph, my friend, I saw you coming out of teacher Moses' office. What were you talking about?"

"It was about the upcoming Mr Southern District contest and I went there to tell him I was interested in it."

"Is that what you want? The last time you said that the chapter was closed. What has made you change your mind?" He asked with an astonished face.

"Somebody has told me that sometimes you must do something over and over until you are perfect. Also, you should never give up on your dreams."

"What? Where are you learning such powerful stuff from? They are powerful words of inspiration."

"I have learned them from somebody and I won't tell you his or her name."

"I know you and teacher Moses are very close these days. He is the person who is teaching you all this wonderful stuff, isn't he?" Instead of answering him, he just smiled and glanced at the scene ahead of him.

"Hey, enough of Teacher Moses. Do you want me to teach you the basics of karate?" Joseph shook his head as a sign of disagreement.

"Maybe next time, buddy."

" OK, see you tomorrow, " Joseph said as they parted ways. When Ross disappeared around the corner in the distance, Joseph changed directions and headed toward the forest. Then he heard a whistle from behind.

Chapter 14

Bigboy and his associates were approaching him, but one thing was clear: there was an element of intimidation in their voices when they started talking to him.

"Joseph, if you want what is good for you, stay away from the upcoming contest. It isn't your thing," Bigboy said.

"Above all, you are a lo..." Mariam was short in her tracks.

"Hey! What have you just said? " said Joseph with an authoritative voice.

"Nothing," she said, swept off her feet.

"If you think you can stop me, well, you are wrong. I can do what I want, so stay away from my business. Do you have anything else to say? If not, please excuse me," Joseph said, and walked into the thick forest.

"Now, we must execute our Plan B," Bigboy said, glancing around at his associates with a demonic smile curled on his face, and they nodded. They returned to the village.

"Today, your task is to go hunting, Joseph," the old woman said, and he was told not to come to the castle

empty-handed. He was given a long, gray dog and sat out on his journey to the nearby mountains.

"Joseph, don't go to the western side of the Gogo Mountains. It's dangerous. Don't kill it," the old woman shouted after him.

"Yes, grandmother," he shouted back, glancing over his shoulders, and disappeared into the thick forest. He twisted and turned around trees in the forest but found nothing. Suddenly, he heard a rattling sound underneath the dry grass. He halted in his tracks, and what he saw paralyzed his whole being. A huge black snake hissed and slithered away among the rocks. After a while, he resumed his journey. The dog kept on sniffing around. Unexpectedly, there was a rattling sound in the nearby bushes, a hare shot like a rocket, and the dog was on its tail. He ran after it and the dog kept on barking and the distance between them widened. Until its sound diminished in the distance.

"Where is it?" He asked and glanced around. Then he found it approaching with the hare in its mouth. It was still kicking and alive. They reached the castle and the old woman was over the moon.

"Today, you have passed another test. In life, the secret of success is obedience to instructions. If you obey your teachers, you will reach the highest position in life. Another thing is don't kill animals without permission from the wildlife authority. I have told you not to kill a hare, and you did exactly what you were told. That's obedience. Last, never give up on your dreams or assignments on earth. Similarly, pursue whatever you want until you get it.

"Do you know why you work in small groups?" The old woman asked.

"No" they chorused.

"Well, I will tell you. In life, our challenges aren't the same. You need the right people who think in the same way as you to share your problems with. Life becomes easier that way," she explained to them.

A bowl full of fruit was passed around for everybody to grab a fruit for himself or herself.

"Why are we sharing a bowl of fruit every day?" One tall and well-fleshed boy asked.

"Because God desires to share what we have with others daily, that's why it is done routinely," she said, and she staggered to her feet and disappeared into the house.

Chapter 15

"Son, come and sit here," Joseph's mother pointed at the vacant spot beside her on the couch. She gave a side glance and opened her mouth.

"I have received heartbreaking news today saying that you aren't cooperating with teachers at school and you are not taking part in sports activities. Is that true?" She asked with a concerned face.

"No, mother, as you know, the death of my father affected me. I was hurt. However, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Above all, teacher, Moses has been encouraging me," Joseph answered.

"What about your schoolwork? Please show me your books. I want to know whether you are doing well because last time your results were terrible," she said with a stern face.

Joseph grabbed his bag, opened it up, took out his books, and gave them to her. She glanced down at her books with maximum attention. He hid the white garment between the couch and the wall.

"That was close," Joseph said in his heart.

She flipped through his books one after another. Then she cracked a smile a bit.

"You have improved tremendously, son. Somebody told me today that you like to go to the forest. Is that true?"

"Yes, mother."

"Doing what?"

"That's my top-secret mother. Don't tell it to anybody else, OK."

" OK, my lips are sealed."

"I have just discovered the best way to learn. It's unique. I learn best when I am inspired by nature. The birds singing, the wind whispering through the trees, and the tranquillity of the forest," Joseph said in a low voice.

"I am relieved, son. I have been worried about you. I thought maybe you had become disobedient of late."

"Who has been telling such a bunch of lies?"

"Don't confront them, OK?"

"I won't"

"Bigboy," at the mention of that name, his heart was pierced with pain, and his face changed.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, it is just that I am thinking about my assignments. Can I go to our bedroom and do them?" Joseph deceitfully and his mother nodded. He gathered his bag and walked towards their room with a wounded heart.

"Today, the topic is current affairs. When did the Second World War end?" The students could not answer the question. Suddenly, Joseph's hand shot into the air.

"Yes, Joseph, what's the answer? "And every head spun around and stared at him in the left corner of the classroom. Their eyes pierced through his skin like sharp needles. Panic sat on top. Then, a shadowy figure flew across the window where he was sitting and a dove perched on the windowsill. It was the exact one he had seen at the castle and it stared at him. Then, the words of the old woman came flooding into his mind, "Remember, sometimes you have to confront your fears to emerge victorious."

Joseph glanced around the classroom at every pair of eyes staring at him and gulped after regaining his composure.

"The Second World War ended in 1945," and silence descended upon the classroom. Then, their class teacher, Ms Job, beamed and tears started rolling down her cheeks.

"Do you know why I am crying? It's because, as a teacher, it gladdens my heart to see the most silent student opening up in class and taking part," she grabbed a soft tissue and dabbed her face. She walked toward Joseph, leaned down and told him that he wouldn't amount to anything in a whispering tone. Joseph's face changed from beaming to gloomy. She had killed the little confidence he had.

The clapping of hands roared in the classroom and when they had died down, there was a knock at the

door. Ms Job strolled, walked to the door and swung it open.

Joseph's mother's face emerged on the doorstep and her jaw dropped at Ms Job sight. It seemed like they knew each other and a mixture of anger and resentment was written all over their faces. Joseph's mind tossed over the ocean. Why was his mother there? What was I looking for? They had a whispered conversation with the class teacher and he was called up front.

"Class, continue reading your books while Joseph, his mother, and I go into the storeroom to discuss his progress in school," the class teacher said as she pushed the chair away with a screeching sound and threw glances of mockery at her.

Joseph felt a sense of relief at the words of his class teacher. He thought his mother had rebuked Big Boy and his associates because they had lied to her.

"Class, clap hands for Joseph's mother. It's a good thing to just come to school to see how your child is doing. I encourage all of you to tell your parents to copy what she is doing. Educating a child becomes much easier when teachers and parents work together," she said, and they disappeared into the storeroom.

They entered a small room with shelves mounted on the wall and a stack of unique books on top. Sunlight entered through a small window and a steel table surrounded by four chairs was in the middle of the room. They sat down around the table.

"Joseph's mother, I'm more than happy to know you," she said with a smile of amusement on her face.

"I'm happy too. How is my son doing in class?" She asked, throwing a forced smile back at her.

"He's distant, looked depressed and his grades were declining. However, a few days ago he improved tremendously and today I asked a question and answered with confidence. He is fine, nothing to worry about because he is under my eye."

"After the passing away of his father, he was emotionally and psychologically affected and he seemed to change from bad to worse every day"

"What about sports activities?" She asked.

"That one he will answer," the class teacher said, glancing at Joseph. There was something sinister in her face that Joseph couldn't comprehend.

"I haven't been taking part in sports activities because I was shy and depressed. However, I'm regaining my confidence," Joseph answered.

"Who is helping you?" Mrs Job asked with excitement registered all over her face.

"I was....," He halted when a tiny figure grabbed his attention on the windowsill. It was the dove he had seen earlier on the classroom windowsill and he remembered he shouldn't tell anybody about his association with the old woman and it flew away.

"It's teacher Moses, who has been helping me all along," Joseph said as he turned his face and answered the question.

" Mr Moses is a good man indeed. He has even given you another opportunity to join Mr Southern District competition, didn't he?" His mother asked him.

"Yes, mother and I have tried it again."

"Good boy, but some people are programmed to fail. You should just throw in the towel just like your father. Isn't it madam?" Joseph's class teacher responded with a demonic glance. Psychologically, Joseph had more questions than answers. *Why was his class teacher against his progress in life?*

The meeting was over, Ms Lorraine left without saying goodbye. Joseph was thrown deeper into the ocean of uncertainty and confusion.

Chapter 16

"Today we are going to do something unique. We are going to do what we love the most. What you want to achieve in life. Joseph, what do you want to be in life?" The old woman asked.

"I want to be a model?" He answered, and the other children giggled and chuckled.

"We aren't here to make fun of one another. We are human beings with weaknesses, but we should help one another to turn them into our strengths. That's to say, turning their weaknesses into strength, and to do that we need one another," she rebuked them and silence descended upon the place.

"Where were we? I was saying today we are going to do what we love the most. We will start with Joseph."

They leapt to their feet and formed two lines and Joseph started to walk in between. However, he halted in his tracks and covered his face with his hands with shame registered all over his face.

"Start all over again. Don't focus on other people. Focus on what you are doing to avoid disruption," the old woman said encouragingly.

Joseph started repeatedly until confidence had sat in.

"Good, but one thing is not present in what you are doing. You aren't real. Joseph smiled with boldness. Reveal your teeth as your mouth curls into a smile. Walk proudly, with your face held high," Joseph

repeated the same thing over and over. Then, it was other people's turn to show what they were capable of until their list was exhausted.

They gathered around the old woman and a bowl of fruit was passed around for everybody to grab something to eat.

"Today, the lesson is over. Remember, don't focus on what other people around you are saying, and instead focus on what you want to be. Lastly, be yourself. Don't imitate other people's actions. Lesson time is over," And they dispersed.

Joseph hurried home. When he reached there, his mother was concerned again because the sun had almost buried its golden head behind the western horizon. Casting shadows on the ground signalling the approaching night, which ultimately envelopes the earth.

"Where have you been?" She asked.

"I have been studying with others on another side of the village, to catch up with them," Joseph came up with a bunch of lies to conceal where he came from. Then, his mother was relieved. He asked her what was going on between her and his class teacher. But he was told that some things are better left in the past.

She stood up and disappeared into the kitchen to prepare some supper and, when it was ready, they ate until they were satiated.

"Today, son, I want you to go outside and look at the environment. Do you know why? Because sometimes, by looking at nature from the perspective of God, you can learn a lot. That's what my late mother told me. Whenever she was feeling lonely, she would go outside and look at the starry sky. She told me that as she was looking, she would see the signature of God in the universe. You know, the rising and descending of the moon, stars moving around the universe in perfect harmony with the laws of nature, and so on. She told me that later she would know that indeed God is alive, on the throne, and watching over her life."

"Last time I was in the forest, you know, when I saw a patch on the ground which had been consumed by fire, however, there was a certain plant that had grown there and was very green."

"Yea, do you know what that means? It simply means, no matter what your environment says, you can still be what God has created you to be."

"I didn't know."

"In life, never focus on your family background, physical appearance, nationality, or the colour of your skin and you can be a star. Let's go outside."

"I have got so much to learn," Joseph said. His mother grabbed his hand gently and went outside. It was pitch black, the sky was cloudless, and a cold wind whipped their faces. The street lights around Kanye twisted and turned along the streets like a meandering river. His mother went inside, grabbed two chairs, and sat side by side.

"Look at how the stars are shining in different colours. Some are bright while others are dim," Joseph said, glancing at the sky.

"Yea, one thing is certain: every star serves a specific purpose assigned by God. Similarly, every one of us serves a specific purpose under heaven and must be content with that. Son, don't desire other people's purpose. Focus on your own and you will be catapulted into stardom," she said, running her hand through his head.

"Mother, according to science, the moon has no light of its own. It depends on the sun."

"True, in life, you must use whatever God has deposited in you to change other people's lives positively."

"Those are powerful words of wisdom."

"I saw a certain tree that is only found in the Kalahari Desert in our area. Can you believe it, mother?"

"It's a lesson. In life, success comes inside, not outside. No matter where God has planted you, you can be prosperous."

"Mother, I didn't know that you were fully loaded with wisdom."

"I learned it from my mother, who learned it from my grandmother, and so on. It has been handed down from one generation to another."

As the night progressed, they went inside the house, crawled under their blankets, and went to sleep.

Chapter 17

When lesson time at school was over, a familiar figure approached him. He was walking across the schoolyard with his hands on his back. He halted in front of him with a smile on his face and Joseph smiled back. Monday morning was wonderful.

"The contest is this weekend. How far are you with your preparation?" The teacher, Moses, questioned him.

"Tomorrow I will be ready, sir," Joseph responded.

"You should meet me at my office tomorrow. I would like to introduce you to somebody who can help you with your preparation."

"OK, Sir, thank you so much. You are indeed a blessing in my life."

"You are welcome," Teacher Moses walked away towards his office, and disappeared around the corner of a classroom.

It was his last day with the old woman. Joseph was going to miss her badly. She had been a pillar of his strength and encouragement. What he was going to miss the most was her deep wisdom. Her method of teaching was out of this world. She taught them using real-life experiences. He was going to miss her warm, wrinkled smile, which had ignited every spark of hope inside of him. He was going to miss the place which was full of peace and harmony; the hills covered with cascading flowers, the carpet of green grass dancing

merrily in the wind, the golden sunset, and the wonderful landscape. And he was going to miss other children from all over Africa that the old woman had gathered under her wings and helped them discover who they were and what they were before the foundation of the world.

Ross waved a hand in front of his face, disrupting his thoughts. His karate gear was on. Ross wasn't ashamed of the sport that he loved the most. He was a very confident young boy who was always ready to share what he had with others. He had played a huge role in helping him to discover who he was. Her mouth curled into a smile.

"Ross, thank you so much for being patient with me. You are indeed a genuine friend. You have been with me through thick and thin."

"No, thanks to you. You have shared words of wisdom with me and motivated me. That's what friends are for."

And they walked away. Out of nowhere, Bigboy and his group approached them. They stopped in front of them with mockery smiles on their faces.

"Joseph, this weekend I am contesting too for Mr Southern district. So please stay away from the contest," Bigboy said.

"I can do what I want when, where and when I want. So you can't stop me," Joseph said with boldness.

"Joseph, you are too weak to represent our district. We need somebody who has all the qualities of a champion. Look at me," Bigboy said, and lifted his fleshy hands.

"Enough, Bigboy, in life what matters is your real you. Doing something with love and a pure motive not to boast," Ross said.

"You don't know what you are talking about. This is a real champion. Just look at his physique," Mariam said, pointing at Bigboy and chuckled.

"If you don't want to get hurt, just step aside, or we will meet at the contest," they giggled and marched away.

"What if Bigboy is telling the truth? Look at his physique. I can't compete with him," Joseph said in a tone of despair.

"Don't worry, I know you are going to win. Just focus on preparing yourself mentally and physically. Bigboy has a shallow mind, that's what will frustrate his chances. That's to say, he is counting his eggs before they hatch. That's your advantage," Ross said encouragingly.

"Thank you, my friend, for your words of encouragement," Joseph gave Ross a bear hug and parted ways.

"Today is the last day of our training program. I want to tell you a story about my life. When I was a youth, I used to look down on other people because I worked for a prestigious company as an accountant. Driving expensive cars. But, I was raised in a poor family when I became successful. I forgot where I came from and lost steps in life. One day, God touched my heart and started uplifting other people, something which I am doing today. After today, don't forget where you come

from, help at home, your parents in their business, look around in your community and help other people who are less privileged in our society. That's what makes God happy," she said, glancing around with her usual smile.

"Grandmother, how did you end up here?" One boy quizzed in the background.

"It's God's arrangement, and it's my purpose to help other people who are despised in the whole of Africa." A dove appeared on the horizon with a bunch of papers stuck on its peak and landed on her lap. She brushed it back tenderly and took out the documents.

"This is the list of the recruits- it is from God almighty. He looks around Africa, identifies children who need my gifts, registers them, and presents them to me. Then, I will visit them at their homes and enrol them in his program."

"I thought it was your idea," one girl said with a tone of excitement.

"The program may be mine, but God is the driver of the vision. He is my boss and I am his humble servant. All the glory goes to him," She bowed down and worshipped God.

The old woman told them to put on their garments as a symbol of graduation. There was joy and happiness. They cheered. Ululation split the atmosphere apart and whistled. When the clapping of hands had died down, she gave them a bear hug one by one with tears rolling down her face.

"Why are you crying, grandmother?" Joseph asked.

"I am not crying. I am overflowing with joy and happiness. It makes me happy when young children like you grow up knowing their purpose because they are going to make the world a better place for everybody," she answered, wiping her tears with the back of her hand.

"Grandmother, what are we doing to do with these garments?" Joseph questioned her.

"You must go with them and God will take care of the rest. When they have completed their assignment, God is going to give a sign."

The children wrapped themselves in white garments and disappeared into the clear sky of Africa and went to their respective countries. Joseph herded home and thrust his bag onto the concrete floor. And he leaned back on the couch facing the creaking roofing sheets. Then, he reached into his bag, and, to his astonishment, the garment was gone. He smiled to himself when the old woman's last words flashed across his mind.

"When something has completed its assignment, God is going to give you a sign." This was the sign she was talking about.

Chapter 18

Joseph knocked on the door of Teacher Moses 'office and swung it open. He had a seat and told him he was ready. He was thrilled and asked one student outside to call Ms Joy for him. She came into the room within a few minutes.

"This is the young man I was talking about last time," he said.

"I am happy to meet you," Ms Joy said, and she stretched out her hand across the table. And Joseph grabbed it.

"His name is Joseph. Joseph, this is Ms Joy, our guidance and counselling teacher, and she will help you with your preparation."

"Yes, sir."

"If you don't mind today, I have a meeting in our support group and you are free to join us," Ms Joy said with a smile on her face.

"What is a support group?" Joseph asked her.

"It's a group of people who meet regularly to share problems or challenges and how they have overcome them. There are young people of your age there."

"Group of people, what if they go around the village telling the wrong people about other people's problems?"

"They are disciplined young children. We are there not to mock one another but to help each other. You know, we share genuine issues and it helps to make life easier," She answered.

"There is nothing to worry about, son," Teacher Moses assured him.

"I will be there," Joseph said, beaming.

"In-room 10," Ms Joy said and she stood up, swept across the floor, and banged the door behind her.

They shot to their feet and teacher Moses wished Joseph the best. And Joseph went out of the room.

Joseph and Ms Joy went to room 10, as they had agreed. There were few students there to attend the class session. It was a well-ventilated room with tables in four rows and chairs around them. They were talking loudly, but when they entered the room, the noise diminished.

"Good morning, teacher. How are you today?" They chorused, standing up.

"I am fine, thank you. You can sit down," Ms Joy said as she sat on the chair behind a wooden table with a blackboard at her back.

"Today, we have a new student. His name is Joseph. Let's give him a round of applause." The clapping of hands erupted in the classroom, and when it had descended, she cleared her throat.

" OK, let's share what we are going through. Let's start with Sarah," A tall girl with blue eyes shot to her feet.

"I was the centre of attraction at home until everything was dismantled when my younger brother was born. My parents didn't give me the attention I deserved. My dad never checked my schoolwork or played with me. Then I started isolating myself. One day, I disappeared from home, spent the night in the mall, and the night watchman took me home the following day.

I told my parents how I felt and they apologized, and I forgave them. I wasn't completely healed. However, when I heard about this support group from a good friend of mine, I immediately joined it and my life has changed tremendously. My relationship with my parents has improved too. They give me the attention I deserve." She said with a smile on her face.

"Thank you so much for sharing because somebody's life is being changed by that. Bosman, you are next," Ms Joy pointed to him.

"When my parents separated and ended their marriage because of issues known to them, I was devastated on the inside. Our stable home was destroyed. I pleaded with them to stay together for my sake, but they told me it was impossible. Then, I joined this group. Everyday Healing takes place inside of me."

As you always tell us, Madam, healing is a process, slowly but surely I am getting there," Bosman said with confidence.

"Thank you Bosman for sharing. Joseph, it's your turn," she said.

"Who? I am new. I am still learning," Joseph said with an anxious voice.

"Joseph, share your challenges or story. Speaking out is part of the healing process." Then silence descended upon the room. Joseph rubbed his legs against one another under the table. Chairs and tables creaked on the floor as children dug into each other's ribs, giggling and chuckling. Ms Joy rebuked them.

The class was dismissed, and Ms Joy asked Joseph to remain behind. She encouraged him in every way she could, and he was encouraged indeed.

Chapter 19

It was their last session and, after keeping the register, Joseph shared his story.

"OK, when my father passed away a couple of months ago, I was heartbroken. I became impatient with everyone around me and not cooperative with teachers in the school. I have now met somebody who has been supporting me to sail through the chapter." Everybody listened to him attentively.

"Who helped you?" Ms Joy asked curiously.

"Teachers Moses and a stranger."

"Please, keep talking. We want to learn your secrets." One attendant screamed in the back. A short, black girl with a short haircut.

"They have taught that it doesn't matter what your environment says, you can be what God has created you to be before the foundation of the world."

"What, that's powerful words indeed," Ms Joy said with excitement registered all over her face.

"I was taught the power of being real in life. We shouldn't imitate other people, but we have to be real to ourselves. We must learn to share what we have with others because God desires to do so daily. And we need the right people to share our problems with them. From that time, my life changed forever," Joseph explained and moved his hand around.

"That's inspiring indeed. Can you please tell us the source of your wisdom," A tiny girl with a squeaky voice said in the middle row.

"You mean teacher Moses?" Joseph asked.

"No, I mean the stranger," she persisted.

"There is no other source," Joseph said as he remembered he should not tell a soul about his encounter with the old woman.

"OK, tomorrow we are practising what we love the most," Ms Joy said as she shot to her feet, and the session was over.

The following day, they practised what they loved the most. Some were writing poems and short stories, rehearsing their public speaking skills, while Joseph practised his walking skills. He did the task over and over until perfection, with sweat glittering in the light which flooded the room through the windows. He was told to continue practising, even at home. Ms Joy gave him a big mirror to watch his reflection as he walked around.

Bigboy had all the best resources at his disposal. Even his class teacher supported BigBoy's behaviour. Furthermore, he ate well, using sophisticated machines during training because he was coming from a well-off family. Something which Joseph didn't have. Joseph looked down on himself, however, Ross was there to motivate him and the spark of hope in his heart

kept burning. Bigboy sent his boys to him to tell Joseph that he couldn't win because he had a bulky body, something he didn't have.

"You must concentrate on your strength," Ms Joy advised him.

"I don't want to be a contestant this weekend because Bigboy has everything in the world you can think of to emerge victorious," Joseph said with a sense of despair in his voice.

"Don't worry, his obvious mind is going to destroy him. In the meantime, work on your weaknesses and turn them into strengths," Ms Joy said with a smile.

"You think I still stand a chance to win?" Joseph asked with excitement glowing on his face.

"Yes, you need to be real to yourself. There is an interview too."

"Interview! I have never done one before," Joseph said with a gloomy face.

"Don't worry, you must use your life story to answer questions during the interview. That's the area I know you are going to beat Bigboy in," she said, and they kept practising what he was going to say during the interview until Joseph became perfect.

Chapter 20

Saturday morning, they filled the school hall to the rafters, with a cloudless sky and a chilling breeze biting their black skins. However, it was a favour to the attendance and contestants. People swarmed into the hall, humming and swaying like trees during a windy day. A long table for the judges was prepared, wrapped in white cloth. Outside, people overflowed, whistling, and clapping hands with their eyes glued to the television screen. The colourful lights flooded the hall, matching the colours on the walls.

Roaring erupted each time a contestant walked on the stage made of mahogany. Wearing wonderfully made suits. When it was Bigboy's turn, he came from the background and walked on stage majestically wearing a red suit, black shoes, and a white tie. The noise nearly split people's ears inside the room.

Finally, it was Joseph's turn, his heart beating against his ribs, beads of sweat formed all over his face, nervous. He was quivering like a leaf. Then, he remembered the following words: "Sometimes, you must confront your fears to emerge victorious in life." He gathered some courage and stepped outside the small room behind the stage, and hundreds of pairs of eyes punctured through his skin. Panic sat on top. He walked, but he dashed back into the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen, at the count of ten, Joseph will be disqualified. One, two, three, four, five, six, and seven..." Ms Joy and teacher Moses shot glances of disappointment at each other. His mother, who had

offered him support, was speechless, ripped apart on the inside with shame.

"Come on, Joseph, you can do it," Ms Lorraine whispered in her heart.

"Eight, nine, "the announcer counted.

Suddenly, there was a flapping of wings outside, a dove perched on one tree directly where Joseph could see it.

Joseph gathered enough courage and stepped outside, walked impressively, shoulders squared, head held high, and the atmosphere ignited when the clapping of hands erupted. He strolled, halted, grabbed his waist, and cracked a smile, revealing his long protruding teeth. Some people who supported Bigboy giggled in the background. Then he spun around and walked away. A few minutes passed before the judges compiled the results for the first round.

"Now, we are moving to the next round, which is the oral interview," the announcer said over the microphone. The participants followed one after one, and it was Bigboy's turn.

"Why do you think you should be crowned Mr Kanye District Bigboy?" she asked him and placed the microphone closer to his mouth.

"I should be crowned Mr Southern District because I am smart, I am bulky, and I am loved by everybody. Therefore, I deserve the first position," Bigboy said and stepped back.

"Thank you. Your turn, Joseph," the announcer called upon Joseph and handed him the microphone.

"My name is Joseph. The last time I competed in Mr Kanye contest, I chickened out because of fear. I was called a loser. And I met somebody wise who told me that if I don't confront my fears, I won't be what God has created me to be. I was told if I want to become what God has created me to be, I should not focus on what other people are saying. I was motivated, and all this boosted my confidence. Because of what I went through, I want to help other people to discover who they are and achieve their dreams. "Judges listened to him attentively.

A few minutes passed, and the results were announced.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the winner of today's contest is Joseph!" And a representative from a powerful company handed him 50000 Pula (Botswana currency is equivalent to \$5000).

Students grabbed and threw him on their shoulders; ululated, clapped their hands, and whistled. Joseph waved his hands at everybody and they waved back.

When the clapping of hands, ululations, and whistling had died down, they put him down. His mother walked over to give him a bear hug and Ms Joy and teacher Moses embraced him, too.

"I told you, you can achieve it," Teacher Moses said, looking into his eyes.

"I knew from the start that you had the potential," Ms Joy said with a smile.

"Thank you for your support."

"You are more than welcome," they chorused.

"Congratulations," Ross shook his hand.

"Thank you for your encouragement and for being there for me. You are a genuine friend." They embraced each other.

"I feel terrible because I have been sent by Bigboy and his group to destroy you. But I helped you instead of fulfilling their mission," Ross said with a gloomy face.

"What are you talking about?"

"They sent me to destroy you, but then I realized you are a friendly person -I helped you instead."

"I can't believe what I am hearing!"

Then Ross leaned toward Joseph and whispered into his ear.

"Here comes trouble," Joseph spun around and his heart skipped a bit. Bigboy and his group were approaching them. He looked like a broken boy, humbled to the core.

"Bigboy, tell him you sent me to destroy him, but I helped him because he is a nice boy. I fed you with information. That's why you knew all his movements." Ross screamed at Bigboy.

"Yes, it is true. Joseph, please forgive me for what I have done to you," Bigboy said with tears of sorrow rolling down his face.

"I was driven by jealousy. I did unspeakable things to you. I was wrong. Please, can you forgive me," Bigboy pleaded.

"Somebody once told me that if you don't forgive other people, you won't reach your true potential in life. I have forgiven you." Joseph said.

"You can't forgive him easily. He tormented you," Ross said in an astonished tone.

"I have just done it," Joseph answered.

"You are a good person indeed," Bigboy said as he embraced him.

Ms Job approached them full of regrets and Joseph's mother asked him why she was living in the past. Now she was targeting her son. Joseph had no idea what his mother was talking about. He pressurised her to open a can of worms and she alternately told him that his father was in love with both of them. To make matters worse, Joseph's father chose her over Ms Job, and that's where their conflict began.

Ms Job apologised to them and her issue again didn't end there. She was suspended by the Ministry of Education for her misconduct. After serving her three-month suspension, she changed for good. She treated Joseph like her own child.

Bigboy and his group, on the other hand, dropped their abusive attitudes and became everybody's best friends in school. Joseph's family's life improved forever. Joseph interacted with influential people in the district and beyond. His schoolwork improved tremendously.

The end.